



The Sixty-fifth Season of  
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin  
Concerts

National Gallery of Art  
2,585th Concert

**Octuor de France**

Gabriel Thibaudeau, *guest conductor*

Presented in honor of  
*Henri Rousseau: Jungles in Paris*

October 1, 2006  
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm  
West Building, West Garden Court

*Admission free*

*This concert is made possible in part by support from  
Crédit Industriel et Commercial.*

## Program

Erik Satie (1866–1925)

*Choses vues à droite et à gauche (sans lunettes)* (1914)

For violin and piano

Claude Debussy (1862–1918)

*String Quartet in G Minor*, op. 10 (1893)

Animé et très décidé

Assez vif et bien rythmé

Andantino: Doucement expressif

Très modéré: Très mouvementé et avec passion

## INTERMISSION

Adolphe Blanc (1828–1885)

*Septet*, op. 40 (c. 1864)

For violin, viola, cello, double bass, clarinet, bassoon, and French horn

Maurice Ravel (1875–1937)

*Ondine* from *Gaspard de la nuit* (1908)

Arranged by Marcel Bitsch (b. 1921) for two violins, viola, cello, double bass, clarinet, bassoon, and French horn

## The Musicians

The Octuor (Octet) de France is currently the only French ensemble of its type. Created in 1979 by clarinetist Jean-Louis Sajot, its repertoire includes classical and romantic chamber music, contemporary music, and music set to films. In addition to rediscovering and performing forgotten works from the past, the ensemble regularly commissions new works. With many international tours to its credit, the Octuor makes its third appearance at the National Gallery on this occasion, having previously accompanied the silent films *L'Homme qui rit* and *Au Bonheur des dames* for the Gallery's film series. The Octuor de France has similarly performed at the film festivals of Athens, Cannes, Harvard University, New Orleans, New York, and Telluride, among others. The ensemble's extensive discography includes CDs devoted to the works of Brahms, Jean Françaix, Haydn, Mozart, Anton Reicha, Schubert, and Carl Maria von Weber. Participants in this performance are Yuriko Naganuma, first violin; Jean-Christophe Grall, second violin; Laurent Jouanneau, viola; Paul Broutin, cello; Michel Fouquet, double bass; Jean-Louis Sajot, clarinet; Jacques Thareau, bassoon; Antoine Degremont, French horn; and David Garbarg, piano.

## Program Notes

Octuor de France music director Jean-Louis Sajot has selected works for this program that were written during or just following the life of Henri Rousseau (1844–1910). Nicknamed “le douanier” because he worked at the Paris customs office (although he never achieved the eponymous rank), Rousseau was a contemporary of the composer Emmanuel Chabrier (1841–1894). The artist outlived the composer by sixteen years, but both men witnessed and contributed to the radical upheaval in French art and music that occurred between 1870 and 1894. In the early parts of their careers, both were obliged to pursue the arts as an avocation (Chabrier was employed by the French Ministry of the Interior) and similarly enjoyed a degree of fame only in their later years. Due to his lack of formal training, Rousseau’s unique work was ridiculed by contemporary proponents of classicism and impressionism. However, the freshness of his art won the admiration of avant-garde artists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, among them Pablo Picasso, who gave a banquet in Rousseau’s honor in 1908.

With the exception of Adolphe Blanc, whose career was well established by the time Chabrier’s works became known, all of the composers represented in this program were influenced by Chabrier in one way or another: Claude Debussy claimed that he could not have written certain passages of his *La Damoiselle élue*, a work for women’s chorus, without having heard Chabrier’s *La Sulamite*, which is also scored for female voices; Maurice Ravel paid direct homage to Chabrier in his piano piece titled *A la Manière de Chabrier*; and even iconoclast Erik Satie had to acknowledge that it was not he but Chabrier (in his prelude to *Le Roi malgré lui*) who first indulged in extended passages of parallel ninths.

Satie wrote only three pieces for violin and piano, which he published in a single volume in 1916. As was his wont, the composer gave the piece a nonsensical title, in this case *Items Viewed from the Right and from the Left (without Spectacles)*. He may have been making fun of himself by referring to his signature accessory, which he wore even when posing for a portrait such as the one painted in 1891 by Ramon Casas (1866–1932).

Although much of Debussy's music is for piano, he considered composing for string quartet his greatest challenge. The theme of the *String Quartet in G Minor*, opus 10, is derived from the interval of the tritone, with the result that the tonality is ambiguous. Each movement has its own key signature, but Debussy's tonal center for the quartet as a whole remains G minor. The use of the whole-tone scale (inspired by Indonesian gamelan music, which Debussy first encountered at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889) appears in this work parenthetically, subject to so many transformations that at times it becomes almost indiscernible. The Andalusian dance in the second movement later gives rise to an elongated, morose *Andantino* that is awash in kaleidoscopic harmony.

Blanc was born in Manosque, in the mountainous region of Provence. At age thirteen he was sent to study the violin and composition at the Paris Conservatory. One of his teachers was Fromental Halévy (1799–1862), a leading composer of early nineteenth-century French opera; later, in 1868, Blanc composed a one-act comic opera himself, *Les Deux Billets*. He also conducted the operas and other musical performances at the Théâtre lyrique de Paris from 1855 to 1860. Blanc's mature style, however, is defined by his *hausmusik* compositions for private performance. A romantic Viennese tradition, this type of music was essentially peripheral to the opera-centered musical life of Paris, and Blanc was largely overlooked in his lifetime and in the twentieth century. His chamber works include three string trios, four string quartets, seven string quintets of various configurations, and fifteen piano trios, quartets, and quintets. His most famous work is the *Septet* that the Octuor de France has included in this program.

In its original form, Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit* is a Herculean assignment for the solo pianist. It is no less challenging when scored for several instruments, as in this arrangement by Marcel Bitsch, French composer and champion of music for winds. Each of the three sections of the work derives its title from an eponymous poem by Aloysius Bertrand (1807–1841), an exponent of chimerical poetry who was held in awe by Ravel as well as by fellow poets Charles Baudelaire and Stéphane Mallarmé. Bertrand attributed these poems to the devil, alias Gaspard. In keeping with their literary source, each of the three musical sections has a fiendish aspect. In the case of *Ondine*, effervescent and unrelenting double notes imitate the frenetic movements of a water nymph and her contemptuous laughter.

For the convenience of concertgoers  
the Garden Café remains open until 6:00 pm.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the  
performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones,  
pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of  
the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

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